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AFTER THEY DEFECT...

By David K. Shipler

DEFECTING DIPLOMATS, MILITARY men and intelligence officers from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe have found in recent years that despite their intimate knowledge of the Soviet bloc, the United States Government does virtually nothing to help them use their expertise or adjust to the baffling array of choices in American life. The result, many say, has been that they suffer considerable hardship in entering American society.

A few prominent defectors, such as Arkady N. Shevchenko, the former Soviet official who was Under Secretary General of the United Nations, write successful books, lecture for lucrative fees and give occasional advice to the White House and the State Department. Viktor Belenko, a Soviet pilot who flew his MIG-25 jet fighter to Japan in 1976, works as a consultant to the aerospace industry. But most defectors begin their lives in America in menial jobs entirely unrelated to their skills.

"We have found brilliant people washing dishes, repairing typewriters, on relief," said William W. Geimer, a Washington attorney who has represented Mr. Shevchenko. Mr. Geimer heads the Jamestown Foundation, which was created in 1984 by a group of Chicago business executives to help defectors, especially diplomats and intellectuals, find fulfilling careers in the United States.

"An intelligence officer who graduated first in his class in law school was repairing typewriters," Mr. Geimer said. "A Rumanian economist was victimized by lawyers and lenders and got into the laundromat business in Brooklyn. We got him out. He's starting a career in academic life."

Some defectors believe that the very freedom they sought becomes the problem. Accustomed to higher authorities making decisions for them, they often look to some governmental agency to plan their lives; when they see they have only themselves to rely on, they feel adrift in a sea of seemingly infinite choices. "Scary" is the word that Nikolai Movchan, a Soviet soldier who deserted in Afghanistan, uses to characterize American society's emphasis on personal initiative.

Of those who have deserted from the Soviet Army, five now live in the United States, according to Ludmilla Thorne of Freedom House, a New York-based human-rights organization. They are not highly educated, she said, and are often unable to get and keep jobs.

"They're so young, usually 19 or 20," she explained. "They have no parents, they have no friends, they don't know the language. They're on the far side of the moon."

One, Alexei Peresleni, has gone through a series of jobs during the past two years, according to Ms. Thorne, and is now studying in a Russian Orthodox monastery in upstate New York. Another, Nikolai Ryzhkov, is no longer among the five in America. He returned to the Soviet Union after a difficult time here and has reportedly been sentenced to 12 years in a labor camp.

"He didn't know how to deal with his freedom," she observed. "He couldn't hold a job. He had three jobs in 1984. They all lasted three weeks, not more. He was drifting. He was a free person. He had difficulty dealing with his freedom."

Ladislav Bittman, who defected in 1968, sees the process as profoundly traumatic. He made the odd transition from being a senior officer in the disinformation department of the Czechoslovak intelligence service to teaching journalism at Boston University — where he recently opened a center for the study of his former specialty, warning that "we should never pollute ourselves by putting out disinformation in the U.S. press." Like many defectors, he has changed his name and is now known as Lawrence Martin.

"The individual who makes the decision, for whatever reason, goes into a very deep psychological shock," he said. "You are giving up everything that makes any sense in your life. You have to build up a set of values from scratch. You suddenly become very vulnerable. You are giving up your friends, your family members. You know you will never see them again. Every defector has to go through this crisis. There is no way out of it."

Although defectors might find solace among émigrés or other defectors, they tend to avoid them, assuming that some are secret police agents from their homelands. "The main thing is security," Mr. Martin said. "Every defector tries to maintain a security zone. To maintain contact with other defectors is risky."

He said he understood the decision last fall by Vitaly S. Yurchenko, a high-ranking K.G.B. official who had defected, to return to Moscow.

"He went through a very severe psychological shock, and obviously the people who dealt with him were not sensitive enough. He went back because he went back to something he knew. It was the security. Even very brutal, severe punishment was a kind of security, but here in the U.S. everything was new, everything was strange and unpredictable. He didn't get any help."

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The Central Intelligence Agency, which houses, feeds and pays defecting intelligence officers for periods of debriefing that can last as long as a year, has been widely criticized since the Yurchenko case as neglecting defectors' social and psychological needs.

"They squeeze these guys out and then drop them," said one American who maintains close contacts with a number of defectors. "They don't care about their future. They don't want these people out in the open. They don't want them to become citizens."

To protect defectors from possible kidnapping or assassination by Soviet bloc agents, the C.I.A. usually gives those it debriefs new names and often channels them into obscure jobs after their debriefings, defectors say. And the defectors are usually submissive because they "don't know their rights," the American observed. "They look at the C.I.A. as a benign K.G.B. They attribute all kinds of powers to it that it doesn't have."

The White House, concerned that potential defectors may be frightened off by stories of bad experiences in the West, is reportedly studying these failures and may recommend some corrective measures. The C.I.A.'s deputy director, Robert M. Gates, is said to be concerned about the problems. But Lieut. Gen. James A. Williams, a former Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency who is a vice president of the Jamestown Foundation, doubts that intelligence organizations are the right ones to handle such matters. "None of the agencies that get involved from an intelligence or counterintelligence standpoint are equipped to do social services kinds of things," he said. "They say a guy who defects is a traitor, no matter how you look at it. And they treat them like dirt."

Those defectors in whom the C.I.A. has no interest are, for the most part, left on their own, according to private individuals who try to help. In addition to the Jamestown Foundation, which Mr. Geimer said is currently helping some 25 defectors, another private organization, the International Rescue Committee in New York City, has given Soviet Army defectors some support, including weekly stipends of $45.

TADEUSZ KUCHARSKI

"We had no help whatsoever. We didn't ask for any help. We were not offered," recalled Tadeusz Kucharski. "We went to a hotel. We had our savings from Angola. We began with odd jobs, including packing fish in a fish factory, and later on my wife began working for a bank. I am now working in the real-estate business, selling houses. It is not as though I am complaining. What is important is to be a free man and to do what I want to do."

Now living in New York City, Mr. Kucharski, 42, was the Polish Embassy's commercial attaché in Angola when he and his wife, Anna, defected in 1983. During a visit to Portugal — ostensibly en route to East Berlin — they asked for political asylum in the United States. The decision had been reached slowly, his disillusionment beginning, he said, in 1973, when he served on the Polish delegation to the International Control Commission in South Vietnam and was barred by his superiors from reporting any cease-fire violations by the Vietcong or North Vietnamese. Then came the 1981 declaration of martial law in Poland and the crackdown on the Solidarity trade union. In Solidarity's heyday, Mr. Kucharski had felt free enough to express his irreverent political views rather openly, he said. This candor caught up with him later, and when he received orders to return to Poland, he sensed trouble.

"At a certain age," he observed, "when you are around 40, you have to have your own opinions and your own experience, and it is a time when you don't want to hide what you stand for and what you are thinking. I think it is around 40 when people reject something or accept something and take decisions. I could not bear anymore to pretend to believe what I did not believe."

Having spent nearly five years in Angola, where the C.I.A. was involved in supporting rebel guerrillas in a civil war against Cuban- and Soviet-backed forces, Mr. Kucharski expected to be mined by American agencies as a rich source of information. But he says the C.I.A. has never talked to him.

"Polish propaganda very often said that special efforts were made by the C.I.A. and the F.B.I. to get people to work for the United States," he said. "All this propaganda proved to be complete baloney, because when we came here I observed that nobody really cared. Nobody really cared what we knew, what experience we had, what information would be useful to the United States. It was amazing to me. Nobody was really interested in what was going on in Angola, nobody at all."

YELENA MITROKHINA

The seeds of defection sometimes lie in family problems. Yelena Mitrokhina's marriage to the Washington representative of the Soviet copyright agency had been deteriorating, as she writes in her newly published memoir, "Stepping Down From the Star." He was drinking heavily, she said, and she wished to remain in the United States with her two small children, who are now 9 and 11.

When she left her Soviet

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Embassy apartment in 1978, she also left a note for her husband, Lev, offering him a chance to stay with her. He vacillated for two days, then refused. As the first member of the embassy to have defected, she was taken into the protective custody of the C.I.A. She said the agency provided her with a safe house, gave her $12,000 a year and paid for her children's day-care expenses and her own tuition while she earned her master's degree in business administration at the Wharton School. The C.I.A. also supplemented the low salary she received in her first job and later helped her with her naturalization papers so she could become a United States citizen.

Still, she found the C.I.A. people cold. "I was determined to get away from their money as soon as possible," she said. "I started at $5 an hour at Radio Shack." Finally she set up her own computer consulting firm, doing customized accounting for businesses and enjoying being "individualistic," to use the criticism her Soviet teachers once branded her with. She now earns about $50,000 a year, she said, and owns a house in Washington's Virginia suburbs.

"The insecurity can probably be extremely difficult for people who come from the Soviet bloc," she said. "When I was without medical insurance for a year, it was pretty scary. There are a lot of choices, which is good, but a serious illness can wipe you out. There is nobody to back you up and no social network."

"Now I'm becoming more American," said Mrs. Mitrokhina, who has changed her name to Alexandra Costa. "I'm worrying about mortgages and insurance and keeping up with the latest books. First you get a mortgage and then you run yourself crazy trying to pay it." She laughed merrily.

VASILY MATUZOK

Vasily Matuzok was a 22-year-old diplomatic trainee in the Soviet Embassy in Pyongyang, North Korea, when his father, a Communist Party member and lieutenant colonel in the air force, died back home. "My father wasn't only my dad," Mr. Matuzok said. "He was my very special friend, and I enjoyed a very special relationship with him. My parents were willing to believe what the party said, and he never questioned it. When he was gone, I didn't feel I had any connections with the Soviet Union at all. It was a foreign country, and I felt alienated from it."

In November 1984, Mr. Matuzok, who speaks Korean and said he was working in the embassy as a translator, got permission to go on a trip arranged by the Kim Il Sung University to the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea.

"Control over the group was pretty lax," he said. "I was left alone for some time, and I was able to get to the demarcation line, pretty close. I figured out that I had a pretty good chance of making it by running across the line. I ran across." Gunfire broke out. "They almost got me as I crossed the line," he said. "I made a left turn across the line, and I shouted in English, 'Help me! Cover me!' " North Korean troops chased him into South Korean territory, setting off a gun battle in which three North Koreans and one South Korean were killed and an American wounded.

Helped by the International Rescue Committee, Mr. Matuzok arrived in New York City and lived for six weeks near Grand Army Plaza in Brooklyn. "I tried to comprehend somehow what is America," he recalled. "I was at a loss. I was afraid to go to a store and buy a pack of cigarettes. I didn't know there was such a variety of goods. I couldn't make my choice. I was afraid to go in the streets."

It was also the political variety that baffled him. "At first it was amazing," he said. "I could not comprehend how the United States could allow the existence of the Communist Party. Now I understand that in a true democracy even wrong ideas should be tolerated. The victory of one idea does not necessitate the defeat of all others. They should have a chance of survival and have a chance of being comprehended."

He has worked as a refrigerator repairman, and now does graduate work in Boston. He prefers that the university not be identified. Nor does he want the new name he is using mentioned — because he is convinced that if the circumstances of his defection were known, the university would expel him for fear of losing an exchange program it conducts with the Soviet Union. A reporter's arguments to the contrary could not change his view.

NIKOLAI MOVCHAN

"After having arrived in Afghanistan and having spent some time there, I realized that the war was not the way it was described to us back home. I realized it was an unjust war," said Nikolai Movchan. Now working at a Ukrainian publishing house in New York, Mr. Movchan spends his spare time collecting clothing and other goods to be sent to Afghan refugees in Pakistan. "The fact that Afghanistan has been in my life has left an imprint in what I want to do," he said.

A Ukrainian who was trained in woodworking and

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furniture-making, he was a sergeant in an antitank unit for seven months before he came to a decision, one night in June 1983, to desert. He gave no thought to coming to the United States, he said, but simply to getting out of the army.

"It happened one very early morning, when everybody was still asleep, and it was possible for me to leave the regiment where I was stationed," he recalled. "But they saw me get away anyway, and I realized I was being pursued by helicopters and tanks. But then an Afghan man helped me and concealed me."

In the United States, his "first problem," as he put it, is his lack of English; he had none when he arrived and still speaks very little. The next adjustment problem is that "in this society everything depends on your own initiative," he said. "Over there it's easy in this respect. Personal initiative isn't important. For example, I have decided that I do want to study. But now the question comes up, what do I want to study? How do I go about it? Should I move somewhere? Should I stay here? I realize it's up to me. In the Soviet Union you can't just go from place to place. Now that I can, I'm almost scared to leave here."

ROMUALD SPASOWSKI

As Poland's Ambassador to Washington in 1981, Romuald Spasowski found himself in the uncomfortable position of having to justify the imposition of martial law as reporters questioned him during his repeated appearances at the State Department. "Being an ambassador of the regime, I should have been very cautious about this," he said. "At the same time, I had at the tip of my tongue very strong words and statements. So it was an unbearable condition for me, to hide inside me what I was thinking."

Since driving away from the embassy in December 1981, with his wife, Wanda, his daughter and his daughter's husband, Mr. Spasowski has lectured extensively and written a long autobiography, "The Liberation of One." But he has an air of disappointment about him, for the book did not provide the financial cushion he had hoped for. Fifteen thousand hard-cover copies were sold, but 22 paperback publishers refused to buy it.

That decision of the marketplace is one to which Mrs. Spasowski has not adjusted. "It's some kind of conspiracy," she said firmly. "It makes me uneasy that here in this free country it's possible that this long Russian hand can manipulate American people, American audiences, American publishing houses."

Her husband is not as quick to draw such a dire conclusion. He aims his criticisms elsewhere. "I admire this society," he said. "But some things are shocking to me — for example, that in this society, in the richest country in the world, there is such illiteracy. There shouldn't be hungry people. When I will be earning some money, I would take a portion of it and give it to the hungry people, because I feel it is my obligation." Many defectors share his shock at American poverty.

Like others who have come here, Mr. Spasowski also finds a certain American insularity, a lack of sophistication about the rest of the world. Listening to him, an American suggested that perhaps the United States was somewhat provincial.

Mr. Spasowski beamed and then bellowed, "But what a province!" ■

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